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MONDAY, JANUARY 12TH, 1857.

JAMES HENTHORN TODD, D. D. PRESIDENT,
in the Chair.

JOHN ROBERT KINAHAN, M. B., was elected a Member of the Academy.

The Secretary of the Council read the following recommendation of the Council:—

“That the Executive Committee for conducting the Exhibition of Art-Treasures at Manchester be permitted to make a selection (subject to the approval of the Council) from the Celtic Antiquities in the Museum, provided they comply with the conditions which the Council shall determine.”

A division having been called for, the President declared that the recommendation of the Council had been negatived.

The Rev. William Reeves, D.D., read a paper on the early system of abbatial succession in the Irish monasteries. The cases which were chosen in illustration were the churches of Trim, Armagh, and Hy or Iona. Concerning the first, the Book of Armagh* contains, among some fragmentary charters of the See of Armagh, a most interesting record relative to the foundation and endowment of Trim. It gives a list of the first eight abbots of that church, all anterior to the earliest entry under that head in the Irish annals;† and of them it observes: “*Hi omnes episcopi fuerunt et principes, venerantes sanctum Patricium et successores ejus.*” It also gives a lineal pedigree of the family which sprung from the original grantor of the lands, out of which the ministers of the church were

* Penes Scriptorem; fol. 16 a b.

† The earliest entry concerning an abbot of Trim, in the Annals of Ulster, is 745, which the Four Masters transfer to their 741.

elected. The former is styled the *Ecclesiastica progenies*, the latter, the *Plebilis progenies*, of the founder. This record was written about the year 720, and is copied into a manuscript which was executed about the year 807. This document, which is of undoubted authenticity, serves as a most valuable key to the early system of endowment in the Irish Church, and it helps also to account for the rapid growth of the Irish monasteries, and the territorial jurisdiction which they acquired. It may yet be found that the civil condition of this country was, in the fifth and sixth centuries, in a very disordered state, and that the *immolatio*, or mortifying, possessions by a chief, under such tenor as "To Patrick, Loman, and Fortchern, his (the grantor's) son, until the day of judgment," introduced an element of fixity in tenure of land, which was likely to prove very acceptable in a country where the succession to property was so ill-defined, and property itself so little available to the uses of life. In such case, the grant was made to the great missionary of Ireland as virtual Primate, with limitation, *pro hac vice*, to the minister locally employed by him, and remainder to the family of the son in whose name, or by whom, the grant was made. Hence we find the *Plebilis progenies*, in whom the tenancy of the lands was vested, possessing a regular succession, and furnishing from its members certain *coarbs*, or successors, to the first abbot, who formed the *Ecclesiastica progenies*, and who, being unmarried, exhibit no lineal succession. In fact, the rule was, on each avoidance of the abbacy, to fill up the situation from founder's kin; and, failing a qualified person in the direct line, to choose a successor from a collateral branch. But in process of time, when discipline became lax, and endowments more valuable, it would seem that the *Ecclesiastica progenies* merged in the *Plebilis progenies*, which might easily occur, from a disinclination on the part of the latter to allow the dignity and emoluments to leave their own hands. In such case the tenant in possession probably assumed holy orders

himself, and united in his person the exercise of the religious functions, and the enjoyment of the possessions, of which he was, according to precedent, only the trustee or farmer. The lineal transmission of the abbatial office in various monasteries, which appears in the Irish Annals from the close of the eighth century onwards, had its origin in the usurpation by the *Plebilis progenies*, in the several monasteries, of the functions of the *Ecclesiastica progenies*, which would be the necessary result of the hereditary occupants omitting to keep up the purely spiritual succession. It was this consolidation of spirituals and temporals, no doubt, which led to the existence of the *Abbates laici*, of whom Giraldus Cambrensis* speaks as existing in Ireland and Wales. Hence, also, grew that melancholy misappropriation of the endowments of Bangor, of which St. Bernard† so feelingly writes, and of the proportionate declension of the religious character of that once-famed monastery. Hence, too, in a measure, the anomalies in the case of Armagh, on which the same writer dwells in terms of such heartfelt reprobation.‡

With respect to Armagh, that church was situate in the territory of the descendants of Colla-da-chrioch, one of the founders of the Oirghialla, or Oriel race. Daire, who granted the site to St. Patrick, was of this tribe, and many of the early abbots or bishops of the church were, from the fifth to the eighth centuries, members of the Hy-Bresail, and Hy-Niallain families, which derived their names from descendants of Colla-da-chrioch, and left their designation stamped on the districts which they occupied, still preserved in the forms O'Bresail and Oneilland, the latter of which is known as a barony in the county of Armagh. Subsequently, another descendant of Colla, named Sinach, founded a family, called from him the *Clann*

* *Itinerarium Cambriæ*, ii. 4.

† *Vita S. Malachiæ*, cap. 5 (Messingham, *Florileg.*, p. 356).

‡ *Ibid.*, cap. 7 (Messingham, pp. 358 b, 359).

Sinaich, and to this family the enjoyment of the abbacy of Armagh, styled the "coarbship of St. Patrick," became limited; so that for a space of about two centuries it never left it, and had entailed so many abuses and relaxations of discipline, that St. Bernard, with justice, made the following complaint:—"Verum mos pessimus inoleverat quorundam diabolica ambitione potentum sedem sanctam obtentum iri hæreditaria successione. Nec enim patiebantur Episcopari, nisi qui essent de tribu et familia sua. Nec parum processerat execranda successio, decursis jam hac malitia quasi generationibus quindecim. Et eò usque firmaverunt sibi jus pravum, imo omni morte puniendam injuriam generatio mala et adultera, ut etsi interdum defecissent clerici de sanguine illo, sed Episcopi nunquam. Denique jam octo extiterant ante Celsum viri uxorati et absque ordinibus, literati tamen."* This "Celsus" was *Cellach* of the Irish, who was abbot from 1106 to 1127. From the pedigrees of the Clann Sinaich, preserved in the Books of Lecan and of MacFirbis, illustrated by the details and chronology of the Irish Annals, we are able to construct a genealogical table of the abbots of Armagh, which answers, with wonderful exactness, to the statements of St. Bernard, founded, as they were, upon the information furnished to him by Malachi O'Morgair, and the abbot Congan.

The abbey of Hy, or Iona, was founded by St. Columba, great-grandson of Conall Gulban, the head of the Cinel Conaill, or great Donegal race. St. Columba died in 597, and was succeeded by his first cousin, Baithene, who died in 600; Laisre, the third abbot; Fergna, the fourth; Segine, the fifth; Cumine, the seventh; Failbhe, the eighth; Adamnan, the ninth; Donnchadh, the eleventh; Faelcu, the twelfth; Slebhine, the fifteenth; were all of the same race, so that during a period of two hundred years there are but three abbots whose descent is ostensibly referable to another stock;

* Vita S. Malachiæ, cap. 7 (Messingham, Florileg., p. 358 b).

thus showing that, even in spiritual administration, the element of clanship regulated the bestowal of authority, and that the election of the religious superior was subject, among the Irish, to qualifications of blood, similar to those which constituted eligibility to secular chieftainship.*

Dr. Petrie stated, that in 1832 he had made an analysis of the monumental inscriptions at Clonmacnoise, which proved that the ecclesiastical successions at that Abbey were continued amongst persons of the family of Malone for several hundred years.

DONATIONS.

1. A collection of twenty-nine heel-ball rubbings, taken by Mr. Du Noyer from monuments and inscriptions in different parts of Ireland. Presented by George Du Noyer, Esq.

2. Three bronze brooches; four large beads; and an ornament with pendants in silver, collected by Mr. Jennings at Mogadore, in Africa. Presented by Francis M. Jennings, Esq.

The Secretary of the Academy read a letter from Mrs. Hitchcock, explaining that it was the last wish of her husband, the late Mr. Richard Hitchcock, that his books should be presented to the Royal Irish Academy.

* The reader who is curious on this subject will find the question treated of in the *Life of St. Columba*, lately published by the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society, p. 342; where there is a Genealogical Table of the early abbots of Hy, constructed from the pedigrees in the *Book of Lecan*.